

A. AMENDMENTS TO THE CLAIMS

WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

1. **(currently amended)** A tab plate comprising:

a substantially planar center portion adapted for use with food and having a plate top surface and a plate bottom surface;

said plate top surface bounded by a retaining perimeter means;

said perimeter means including an outer edge and means for stiffening the combination of said perimeter means and said center portion;

at least one tab extending outwards from said perimeter means and having a tab top surface and a tab bottom surface;

said tab top surface oriented substantially parallel to said plate top surface and having a longitudinal axis oriented substantially orthogonal to the outer edge of said perimeter means;

said tab providing means for stabilizing when said tab plate is filled with food; and

said tab further [having flexible means for articulation]being formed as one piece with said tab plate and incorporating a bendable hinge structure with one or more areas designed for bending whereby said tab may be folded upwards and over said center portion to provide gripping means when urged towards said food and said center portion.

2. **(original)** The tab plate of claim 1, wherein at least a portion of said outer edge of said perimeter means is a convexly shaped plate lip.

3. **(original)** The tab plate of claim 1, wherein said tab includes means for tab stiffening at least a portion of the surface area of said tab.
4. **(original)** The tab of claim 3, wherein said means for tab stiffening at least a portion of the surface area of said tab includes a convexly shaped tab lip bounding said tab top surface.
5. **(original)** The tab of claim 4, wherein the combination of said tab top surface and said tab lip provides additional gripping means.
6. **(currently amended)** The tab of claim 4, wherein said tab lip includes tab lip fold lines to function as at least a portion of said [flexible means for articulation]bendable hinge structure.
7. **(original)** The tab of claim 5, wherein the height of said tab top surface is between the height of said plate top surface and the maximum height of said tab lip.
8. **(original)** The tab of claim 7, wherein said tab top surface is at a height approximately 75% of the overall height of said tab plate; and
said tab lip forms a continuous border for said tab plate in combination with a pair of transitional areas and said plate lip.
9. **(original)** The tab plate of claim 1, wherein:

said tab is proportioned with an overall length between a minimum of 2" and a maximum of 50% of the nominal width of said plate; and

said tab is proportioned with an overall width neglecting corner radii ranging between 20% and 75% of the nominal width of said plate.

10. **(original)** The tab plate of claim 1, wherein said perimeter means has a height no greater than 20% of the nominal width of said plate.

11. **(original)** The tab plate of claim 1, wherein said plate is manufactured from at least one of the materials from the group consisting of paper, moisture-resistant coated paper, cardboard, corrugated cardboard, foamed plastic, thermoformed plastic sheet, corrugated plastic sheet, molded plastic, molded foam, molded thermoplastic elastomer and combinations of thin, flexible materials thereof.

12. **(currently amended)** The tab plate of claim 1, wherein said [flexible means for articulation]bendable hinge structure includes at least one means for folding formed in said tab, said means for folding being oriented substantially orthogonal to the longitudinal axis of the tab.

13. **(original)** The tab plate of claim 11, wherein one means for folding is additionally positioned substantially tangent to said outer edge of said perimeter means.

14. **(currently amended)** The tab plate of claim 1, wherein said [flexible means for articulation]bendable hinge structure includes at least one articulating material more flexible than the plate material and the tab material, said articulating material being connected between said plate material and said tab material.
15. **(original)** The tab plate of claim 1, wherein said center portion is round in shape.
16. **(original)** The tab plate of claim 1, wherein said center portion is a shape other than round.
17. **(original)** The tab plate of claim 16, formed with a novelty design shape and using at least one tab as a portion of the novelty design shape.
18. **(original)** The tab plate of claim 1, wherein the tab has at least one feature from the group consisting of formed slits, tearable perforations and means for controlled tearing, said feature being oriented substantially parallel to the longitudinal axis of said tab, said feature dimensioned such that when pulled open, at least one piece of tableware from the group consisting of eating utensils, food serving utensils, napkins and other food related tools and accessories may be inserted and retained in said feature.
19. **(previously amended)** The tab plate of claim 1, wherein said plate bottom surface has a raised pattern and said tab bottom surface has a raised pattern, said raised patterns functioning

cooperatively as means for assisting in manually gripping said tab plate when said tab is gripping said food.

20. **(cancelled)**

21. **(original)** The tab plate of claim 1, wherein at least one portion of the tab plate is made of thermally insulating material.

22. **(original)** A tab plate comprising:

a substantially planar plate center portion adapted for use with food and having a plate bottom surface and a plate top surface, said plate center portion being round in shape, said plate bottom surface being at least partly covered by a raised pattern providing improved grasping, said plate top surface bounded by a retaining perimeter means, said perimeter means extending upwardly and outwardly and having an outer edge, said outer edge bounded by a convexly shaped plate lip for at least half of the outer edge circumference, whereby the combination of said perimeter means and said plate lip provide means for stiffening said plate;

a tab comprising a substantially planar tab center portion bounded by a tab lip, said tab center portion oriented substantially parallel to said plate center portion and at a height approximately 75% of the overall height of said tab plate and having a tab bottom surface and a tab top surface, said tab bottom surface being at least partly covered by a raised pattern providing improved grasping, said tab lip being convexly shaped and extending from said tab

top surface and forming a continuous border for said plate in combination with a pair of transitional areas and said plate lip;

said tab extending outwards from said perimeter means along the section of said outer edge circumference not bounded by said convexly shaped plate lip and having a longitudinal axis radially oriented with respect to said plate center portion;

said tab having a primary means for folding formed tangent to said outer edge of said perimeter means;

said tab further having at least one secondary means for folding formed parallel to and spaced outwardly from said main means for folding;

said tab lip including tab lip fold lines to function as at least a portion of said means for folding;

said tab further having at least one slit feature from the group consisting of formed slits, tearable perforations or means for controlled tearing, said slit feature being oriented substantially parallel to the longitudinal axis of said tab and dimensioned such that when pulled open, at least one piece of tableware from the group consisting of eating utensils, food serving utensils and napkins may be inserted and retained in said feature;

said tab further having a width less than the diameter of said plate center portion; said

tab further having a length less than the diameter of said plate center portion;

and

said tab plate is manufactured from at least one of the materials from the group

consisting of paper, moisture-resistant coated paper, cardboard, corrugated cardboard, foamed plastic, thermoformed plastic sheet, corrugated plastic sheet, molded plastic, molded foam, molded thermoplastic elastomer and combinations of thin, flexible materials thereof.

23. **(original)** The tab plate of claim 22, wherein said center portion is a shape other than round.

24. **(withdrawn)** A method of use of a tab plate, comprising:
filling the plate with food;
bending the tab from at least the primary fold line up and over the food;
grasping the filled plate between the thumb and fingers by placing the thumb over the tab and the fingers under the plate; and
handling said filled plate without directly touching the food.

25. **(withdrawn)** A method of use of a tab plate, comprising:
bending said tab upwards to a position approximately orthogonal to said plate top surface; and
using said tab as a wall to aid in picking up food with eating utensils such as a fork or spoon.

26. **(withdrawn)** A method of use of a tab plate, comprising:

bending said tab so that a portion of said tab is substantially coplanar with said plate top surface;

placing said plate on a surface so that said plate bottom surface and a portion of said tab are in contact with said surface; and

placing a relatively heavy object such as a drinking cup upon said portion of said tab to keep the plate from being blown off of said surface by any moving air.

27. **(withdrawn)** A method of use of a tab plate, comprising:

opening at least one longitudinal slot in at least one tab; and

placing tableware such as eating utensils, food serving utensils, napkins or other food related tools and accessories through said slot.

28. **(withdrawn)** A method of use of a tab plate, comprising:

filling the tab plate with food contents;

lifting the plate by hand; and

grasping the tab by hand to stabilize the tab plate.